

Security Information

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India

Critique of Misrepresentations of India
in US

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To 27 Apr 53

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1. "...Many wrong ideas and information have been spread in this country [India] which are not in the best interest of the growing friendship between India and the US. The correction of these errors will contribute effectively and you will do well in the future to avoid certain published errors which people in India call 'anti-Indian propaganda' and which others misuse against both the US and the pro-US Indians.
2. "Information in the form of articles written by Indians should enable you to understand the other side, which is ignored by foreigners. I should like to give you some examples of how India is misrepresented in the US.
3. "US editors like to publish articles, etc., about India written by their own correspondents, writers, journalists, and observers who visit India off and on rather than articles written by Indians," said an important man in the US Embassy in India. I agreed because it is perfectly natural to rely more on your own countrymen and their writings, since they would have greater appeal to US readers. They also write in a style which gives the US readers the very facts they want most and in a manner which attracts their imagination immediately.
4. "But this is very risky too, particularly in these days when earnest efforts are being made by the US, at tremendous cost, to win Indian friendship and good will. Misrepresentations, wrong facts, or exaggerations in such writings tend to create ill-will among Indians and the critical [sic] section in India, not favoring increasing Indo-US friendship, makes capital out of even small matters innocently written. They are likely to confirm all kinds of suspicions of Indians about US intentions. Naturally, therefore, it is essential for US editors to be extremely careful not to publish wrong information about Indian affairs injuring their sentiments and thus cutting the root of the growing friendship between the people of the two great democracies of the world.

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5. "An impartial analysis of these references to Indian affairs is very revealing and it sometimes appears that a deliberate attempt is made even by the most eminent and responsible men to misrepresent India. Such instances are sometimes most harmful and we must guard against them.
6. "In this report I propose to give some concrete evidence to show you how and what misrepresentations are being made.
7. "Even responsible men like the US Ambassador in India who is always believed to be completely correct and is expected to be more familiar with the facts, since he is on the spot, often makes grievously wrong statements.
8. "In his article appearing in the New York Times dated 23 Mar 52 entitled 'Asia Challenges US through India,' the present (Democrat) US Ambassador in India, Mr Chester Bowles, writes:

'Following the general pattern set in the Point Four pilot study at Etawah each project will lay heavy stress on increasing agricultural production.'

9. "Participating in a Columbia Broadcasting System program 'Capital Clockroom' broadcast on 18 Jan 52, Mr Bowles again said:

'The US is trying to help them help themselves. Horace Holmes (Point Four expert) went out there to help them....'

10. "The Etawah pilot project work, of which I am a resident, is not a Point Four program. Point Four aid implies financial as well as technical help, but here there was more. In fact, on 5 Jun 50 the President of the US / Harry S Truman / approved the act of international cooperation, authorizing the Point Four program. On 6 Sep 50 the first annual appropriation of US\$34,500, 00 for the fiscal year 1951 became available and on 8 Sep 50 the Point Four program became the responsibility of the Department of State by executive order.
11. "The Etawah pilot project work was started in September 1948.
12. "It is thus entirely apparent that the Point Four program came into existence two years after the work at Etawah had started and nothing has been done yet by Point Four in any form or shape to take the credit.
13. "Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, who visited India early in 1952 as a guest of the Indian government, paid a visit to Etawah and wrote about its work in her worldwide syndicated column 'My Day,' appearing under Allahabad (India) 19 Mar 52 dateline, as follows:

'When our [US] Point Four people first arrived, the farmers thought only of digging a big canal for irrigation purposes which could have been an expensive project, but it was quite evident that no money was forthcoming for this; therefore, Mr. Holmes started by inducing them to try better seeds in small sections of their fields. Then gradually tube wells were put down and more irrigation was possible....'

14. "In the same column in the concluding paragraph, Mrs Roosevelt wrote:

'Altogether I was so interested by Etawah that I wanted to tell the whole world about what Mr Holmes of the US working for the Point Four program has started.'

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15. "This implied that when work was started at Etawah, there was no proper plan of work, that people entertained wild ideas and hopes, that enough money had not been appropriated, and that it was Mr Holmes who gave the lead to drive away the confusion and that he was a Point Four man.
16. "All of this, however, is not true. Before work was started at Etawah, experts had a definite, well-thought-out plan and ample funds at their disposal for executing it. People never thought of digging a canal and wanted to know what they would do, since a big canal with many tributaries already existed there. Tube wells were put down to supply more water at will. There was no room for confusion of any kind and the experts started the work according to the pre-arranged plan. The greatest mistake, bordering on mischief, is the suggestion that it was started by or under Point Four. As explained above, Point Four had nothing to do with it, and Mr Holmes, who is now working in India with Point Four, was at that time an employee of the Uttar Pradesh State and had been sent to India to work as an assistant and later joined the Point Four.
17. "In the last paragraph of Mrs Roosevelt's above-mentioned column, she says the Etawah project was started by Mr Holmes, which is not true. Mr. Albert Mayer, a US town planner who conceived the idea, planned the project, put it into work and still continues to work for it.
18. "When I called Mrs Roosevelt's attention to all these facts, she corrected her previous writings with the following, under the dateline Hyde Park, 10 Jul 52:

'I have a letter from a gentleman in India who points out that I was incorrect and left rather an incorrect impression when I wrote a column on Etawah, India. I am sorry to have been inadequate and I hereby correct it immediately. But I also wish to say that in a short column it is difficult many times to tell the whole story about anything.'

'The project of Etawah was started by the Indian government. Albert Mayer, a US architect who is building the new capital of Upper Punjab, was responsible for the early recommendations on which work was to be done and has continued to watch over it with interest. The government [of India] had engaged Horace Holmes, a US extension agent and he worked in India for two years before our [US] Point Four program came into the picture at all. Later Mr Holmes was kept on under the Point Four arrangement.

'This information came to me from a man who is an author and journalist of the Etawah area [source]. I am very grateful to him that he corrected the impression that I had created. I have mentioned Mr Mayer on several occasions. He has been interested in and guided much of the building in this and other Indian areas.'

19. "Such misstatements and half-hearted corrections by such eminent people as Mrs Roosevelt create much misunderstanding and confirm various suspicions already existing in India. She corrected her previous writing but not all of the facts, and that correction not in clear language.
20. "When Mrs Roosevelt visited Etawah, she was in the company of the Uttar Pradesh (UP) governor (she mentions this fact in the same column), from whom she could easily have ascertained these facts. But she relied on her own countrymen who put her in such an awkward position and did a lot of harm not only to her own prestige in India but to Indo-US friendship and good relations. In her Allahabad 18 Mar 52 dateline column, she gave the source of her information, which she later had to correct as follows:

'The evening before on the train Mr Holmes, a Point Four man who started this work and who received his training at Cornell University, came in to talk with me about what they were doing so that I would have a little background information to help me observe.'

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Evidently Mrs Roosevelt was deliberately misled by Mr Holmes.

21. "Her original columns appeared in Indian newspapers but not her corrected ones. She did not appear to have made any effort to enlighten the Indian people about her corrections, leaving them free to form any opinion as to her intentions and those of the US which she represented.
22. "But Mr Chester Bowles, the US Ambassador in India, has not deemed it necessary to correct his statements referred to above despite my rather lengthy correspondence with him and the verbal admission of the mistakes by his assistant probably because of the official position he now holds.
23. "Although unusual for ambassadors, Bowles has written several articles about India and may have committed equally serious and damaging statements. In another article entitled 'New India,' appearing in the US quarterly review, Foreign Affairs, in October 1952, which recently came to my attention, Bowles writes:

"In addition, there were 564 princely states, of which only Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Mysore were of significant size; while 202 had areas of less than 10 square miles."

24. "While the number of princely states is not entirely accurate, Bowles's statement that Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Mysore were the only ones of significance is misleading. There are several other states of significant size, such as Baroda, Gwalior, Indore, Jaipur, Jodhpur, etc.

25. "At another place in the same article, he writes:

"The answer lies largely in making more consumer goods available in the village bazaar at reasonable prices. There are tens of millions of Indians who have never owned a pair of shoes or a change of clothing. The market for new cooking equipment and simple comforts is almost unlimited."

26. "The above gives an incorrect picture. There are plenty of consumer goods in the market, barring a few items, but Indians have no money to buy them. An Indian could not own a pair of shoes not because of a shortage of shoes but because he never had the money to spare for them. Now with a slump taking place, the general complaint in India is that consumer goods are lying in the shops and stores and that there are no buyers. It is true that the market for cooking equipment and simple comforts is nearly unlimited but the Indians have no money to buy them.
27. "It can be argued that neither Mrs Roosevelt nor Mr Bowles is a professional writer and such mistakes are possible. But the truth is that their views and observations carry far greater weight than those of an ordinary writer; therefore, they should be more careful in their writings. However, professional writers and experienced editors have done no better.
28. "Another very important man of the same US embassy [in India] very proudly gave me a copy of Mr Ralph McGill's report on India, containing all the columns he wrote during his stay in the interior of India which had also appeared in the US daily The Atlanta Constitution, of which he was the editor, challenging me to point out wrong facts and wrong impressions, as he was sure it could not contain such a thing. He gave the report to me and I discussed the wrong facts, misrepresentations, exaggerations, etc., in the US and Indian press about the Btawah project in which the US Embassy had a hand.
29. "Since McGill wrote about the Btawah district where he stayed during most of his stay and I reside in between Ayana and Mahova, the top areas about which he wrote and in which he stayed, I can give the correct and factual picture.

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29. "Writing about Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru under the New York City dateline appearing in the Atlanta Constitution dated 21 Nov 51, he said: 'He sold his beautiful spacious house and grounds....' Evidently he referred to Pandit Nehru's famous Anand Bhawan, afterwards called Savaraj Bhawan, which was the headquarters of the Indian Congress Committee for a number of years. It was not sold but given free of all cost to the Congress to house its head office. There is plenty of difference between selling and giving free of charge.
30. "Writing about Mahatma Gandhi under the Karachi dateline appearing in his paper / Atlanta Constitution / on 1 Dec 51, Holmes says: 'He (Gandhi) was shot on Sunday 25 Jan 48.' Gandhi was shot on 30 Jan 48 and it was a Friday and not the day and date he mentioned.
31. "Under the Ayana, District Etawah, UP headline appearing in Atlanta Constitution of 10 Dec 51, he writes this: 'So great is the shortage of fuel that cowdung is made into cakes and dried so that it resembles and burns like the peat of Ireland.'
32. "Cowdung cake is not used because of a fuel shortage but because of the quality of the fire it produces. Its fire is more suitable for good cooking and it is so cheap and convenient to make and use during the monsoon when wood is moist and gives more smoke.
33. "Writing about the Etawah pilot project work, which he came to see in particular, under the New York City dateline appearing in the Atlanta Constitution dated 21 Nov 51, he writes: 'There our [US] agricultural aid has brought many changes.
34. "He again makes reference to this work under the Ayana headline appearing on 10 Dec 51 in the following words:

 '...who is in charge of the farm project being conducted by the Indian government with Point Four assistance....'
35. "Holmes emphasises US aid in this area [Etawah] again under the Ayana dateline appearing on 11 Dec 51, as follows:

 'Here thanks to ----- and his associates, Indian and American, the administration of US aid has been sound and productive.'
36. "But the fact is there was no US aid either technical or financial in the Etawah pilot project area. The Etawah work was started in September 1948, two years before Point Four was formed in the US and much before it came to India. Some Americans who worked in this area were employed and paid fully by the Uttar Pradesh state.
37. "Under the Etawah headline appearing on 12 Dec 51, Holmes says: 'Etawah is the smallest of 48 districts in the state called the United Province,' and goes on to describe the annual livestock fair of the Etawah district as 'the largest fair in all India.' He called it the United Province, though its name was changed to Uttar Pradesh in 1949 under the new constitution.
38. "Etawah is not the smallest district of this state nor is its annual cattle fair the largest fair in all India. It is not the largest fair even in our state of Uttar Pradesh.
39. "Appearing on 13 Dec 51 under the Ayana headline, he mentions - 'There are in India 48 other such states.' He would have been correct if he said there are 48 such districts in Uttar Pradesh. There are only in all, big or small, 28 states like Uttar Pradesh in the whole of India.

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40. "In other places we also find some evidence of confused thought. Under the Ayana headline appearing on 13 Dec 51, Holmes writes: 'There is an area which is semi-desert and irrigation is necessary. There are two canals flowing through more than 300 miles of the area, driving from the Ganga (Ganges) River.'
41. "Under a Mahewa headline appearing on 17 Dec 51, writing about another village called Andawa a few miles from Ayana, he says: 'The land in this area, which is in the vast Ganges River Valley, is very fertile but arid. Aside from the monsoon which brings rain from late June to late August, there is literally almost no rain at all.'
42. "In the first paragraph if he described the Ayana area, he is wrong, since there is only one canal and the land is not semi-desert at all. If he means the whole Etawah district which has two canals, the land again is not semi-desert.
43. "The second paragraph gives more evidence of the confusion of description. The whole Etawah district, not the village of Andawa alone, including the village of Ayana, lies in the vast Ganges River Valley and the land is very fertile. I should perhaps say that the land lying between the two famous rivers, the Ganges and the Jamuna, called Dogh land, is the most fertile land in the whole of India, and Etawah is situated in this area. It seems ridiculous to describe it as semi-desert. Rainfall continues from late June to late August and also in September. In December and January there are showers or rain again and often more than is necessary for canal-irrigated land.
44. "Under the Ayana heading appearing on 18 Dec 51, Holmes writes: 'There were letters to mail so we drove along bullock cart routes to the canal bank which flows from the Ganges through 300 miles of this parched land, and along it to the post office at Auraiya 11 miles away.'
45. "'It [Auraiya] has a bank with a policeman on guard in a uniform like a soldier and armed with a rifle.'
46. "The first paragraph is a sad and incorrect reflection of the Indian postal system. It implies that he had to go to Auraiya 11 miles away just to post his letters as if there were no post offices capable of carrying his mail nearby. There is a post office for the village of Ayana itself and the area five miles around as quick in carrying mail as Auraiya's post office. It is wholly incorrect to say he had to go there for the sake of posting his mail. It would have been reasonable for him to say that he went there to see what it was like.
47. "It is equally wrong to say that Auraiya had only one bank as described above with a policeman. Auraiya has more than one bank and the man he described as a policeman was not one at all but a sentry of the bank, employed to guard it. He seems to develop a peculiar way of boasting US aid to impress US readers. Under a Mahewa dateline appearing on 20 Dec 51, he writes:
- 'The Indian masses were never given schools....Now they are being given schools and assistance in learning. The US is taking a part in it though always with and under the Indian government, which is proper.'
48. "There were schools not only in this region [Etawah district] but all over India even during the days of the British and compulsory primary education existed in some villages. The numbers of schools constantly increase and reach a larger number of villages--even in the most remote corners.

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49. "I do not know what part he thinks the US is playing in it. I have already stated that in the Etawah project the US has not contributed a single bit. There is no justification to say so when there was no such US aid in any form.

50. "While writing about the Prime Minister [Nehru], with whom he lunched, he shows the same ignorance. Under the Mahewa headline appearing on 22 Dec 51, he writes:

'Even Nehru's daughters attained [sic], etc.'

Pandit Nehru has only one daughter, Mrs Indira Gandhi. He should have written sisters to be correct, since Nehru has two.

51. "Describing his lunch with Nehru under the New Delhi headline appearing on 6 Jan 52, Holmes says:

'So we talked and his gracious sister, Madame Pandit Nehru, and his charming daughter chatted briefly.'

He did not know that his [Nehru's] gracious sister, who has been Indian Ambassador to the US, should have been mentioned as Madame Pandit only.

53. "While writing about general conditions in India under the Mahewa headline appearing on 29 Dec 51, Holmes writes:

'A good half of the population does not drink milk because it comes from an animal.'

It is true that a large number of our [Indian] people do not drink milk because they cannot afford to do so or because they do not get it, but not because it comes from an animal. It is strange to think in this way, since a cow is sometimes called mother immortal for the simple reason that it gives sweet healthy milk. It has become a sacred animal to the Hindus mainly for this reason and they have been drinking cow's milk for centuries.

54. "Even a casual glance at a railway ticket from Etawah to Delhi would indicate to him that the distance between these two places is only 109 miles and not 206 miles as he states in his column appearing on 1 Jan 52 under the New Delhi headline.

55. "I have discussed here some of the major and most glaring lapses in the writings of a very keen, sincere US observer and editor, about whose facts the US Embassy man in India was so certain. Others may be making larger and more serious mistakes, depending on their preconceived notions, objectives, and places of visit. Fed on such stuff by their own countrymen and neglecting the other side by Indian writers, what the US public thinks of India can be well imagined. When such material is widely circulated in the US and India by responsible official US sources, it only indicates their complicity with anti-Indian propaganda, uprooting the feelings of Indo-US friendship and goodwill.

56. "The effect of such irresponsible writing is that the general US press is beginning to believe so many things which are not correct, forming an altogether incorrect idea of what India is today. This is the time when we need more accurate information about each other [India and the US] so that we may understand and sympathize with each other and be more friendly. But such impressions made in the press while misleading US citizen, creates illwill among Indians when they realize such erroneous views of people whom they are trying to befriend. It is easily explained by the Communists and others as anti-Indian propaganda to lower the prestige of India in the US.

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57. "The impression gained by US people as a result of such writings is best illustrated by the following paragraph from the 30 Dec 51 issue of the US paper, New Orleans, entitled 'Point Four in Miniature--A Country Agent at Work in India.'

'And by adopting modern agricultural equipment and knowledge to local conditions and religious laws, he turned the barren valley of Etawah into a bountiful garden.'

Another paragraph runs as follows:

"It will kill the plants before they have matured and that would be taking life which we are forbidden to do," they explained when Holmes wanted to introduce the use of soil enriching legumes.'

58. "As explained elsewhere in this report, Etawah is not a barren valley. It is the most fertile and best irrigated land in the whole of India and the US experts have not succeeded in turning it into a bountiful garden. In fact, these experts have caused more harm than good to Indian farmers, owing to their unfamiliarity with Indian soil and agricultural conditions.
59. "It is equally wrong to suggest that Indians never knew anything about the ploughing of green soil, enriching crops, or that religion stood in their way. They have been using sanai, indigo, etc., as such for decades and no religious ideas have stood in their way.
60. "In fact, in everything I read about India written by US writers and journalists, I find some such information which may be very well described as 'intentionally or deliberately done' and the reasons for it may be interpreted differently by different parties. Even US correspondents in India have been known to report incorrect and damaging facts.
61. "In an article entitled 'Point Four Props Farmers in India' in [a well known US newspaper] by its special correspondent, appearing on 20 Aug 51, there appears:

'For example, some time ago it was suggested to the Etawah farmers that they should try green manure with sanai (sunharp), but the farmers would not plough the green crop as this would require, since, as Hindus, they considered it sinful to destroy anything living before maturity.'

62. "So many misrepresentations in the writings of numerous US persons and papers have been printed about Etawah. We can well imagine the number and extent of such indications. All this is about Etawah, but there may be many more places like Etawah and the cumulative result is shocking to our imagination.
63. "Herculean efforts, on the one hand, by the US government and such misrepresentations based on completely inaccurate facts, inventions and lies, on the other hand, go together, and I wonder if the results are satisfactory to the US people or their government or to the Indian people who now deserve better consideration, particularly after so many misrepresentations have been indulged in by the then British rulers to prove Indian incapacity for Swaraj to the US for decades. Instead of counteracting such things, they continue only to undermine the future pleasant relations of the peoples of the two great democracies of the world. There is still time to think and be careful."

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